

Field Naturalists' Club of Ballarat Incorporated

MAY 1997

EXCURSION - NEWS SHEET

Meeting : May 2 Dr N Schleiger : Geology of the Western Highway

Meeting: June 6 Mr J McLaughlin : Black-eared Miner in the Mallee

Excursion : May 3 Geology of the Western Highway :
Dr N Schleiger (Saturday excursion)

Excursion : June 8 Dollys Creek old mining area : Mr L Fink



President: Mr G Binns
Secretary: Mr L Fink
Treasurer: Mr J Gregurke
Editor: Mr A Dyson

Postal Address:
PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350.

Meetings are held at the Art Building,
School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard
St South, commencing at 7.30 pm.

Excursions commence from the corner
of Sturt and Armstrong Sts., Ballarat, at
9.30 am for full-day excursions or at 1.30
pm for half-day excursions.

FIELD REPORTS

Lyndsay Fink - a Tawny Frogmouth on the side of the road at night Feeding - possibly on a possum.

John Stayt - early in January counted 21 Little Penguins in the Twelve Apostles area. About 30 years ago he saw over 100 of these birds in the same area. John also observed Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos along the coast. On the 8th March in the Beeac / Lake Corangamite area - 2 Cape Barren Geese and 16 Brolgas on the mudflats. Also hundreds of Straw-necked Ibis and about 35 White-faced Herons. John reported (on 3rd April), 5 very active Great-crested Grebes on the north-east side of Lake Wendouree.

The Dalman family reported seeing an echidna and a Black Wallaby at Mount Beckworth on 4th April.

Greg Binns - Black-faced Cuckoo Shrikes in his garden.

Chris Baulch - 2 snakes seen on the beach at Port Campbell. One was a White-lipped snake and the other thought to have been a Copperhead. (Led to much speculation - how did they get to the beach below steep cliffs? Dropped by birds? Fallen over cliff edges?)

TRIBUTE TO FLORENCE WILLIAMSON.

At the General Meeting on 4th April President Greg Binns paid tribute to the commitment made to the club over many years by Florence Williamson.

Florence has retired from the Committee after serving on it for twenty one years, including eleven consecutive years as Treasurer.

In making a presentation to Florence, Greg thanked her for her loyal service during this long span of constant participation in club affairs and wished her many more years of enjoyment with the club.



DIARY DATES

9 May - applications for second VFNCA Skills Workshop at Rowsley (north Brisbane Ranges) due. Detailed brochures and application forms are available. Workshop runs from 29 September to 5 October, or part thereof. (See below for some details from the program)

Tuesday 27 May - Committee Meeting at
Murphy) at 7.30 pm.

(Pat

VFNCA Skills Workshop

More about the field projects

It is presently proposed to give participants a choice of two special focus project areas from the following options, in which the skills developed at the start of the week will be applied on the Wednesday and Thursday.

Ironbark-stringybark-box woodland communities & ecology

This will provide scope for people with particular interests in various types of flora and fauna to work together in building up comparative pictures of different but related communities. Issues relevant to box-ironbark communities in Victoria will be incorporated.

Assessment and management of roadsides and small reserves

The techniques of assessment and interpretation practised in this study project will be equally relevant and applicable in smaller bush reserves elsewhere in Victoria, where there are pressures from various surrounding influences such as weed invasion.

Understanding and tackling types of land degradation

While field naturalists typically visit more 'natural' bush areas, we cannot ignore the wider scene which includes extensive areas where land degradation is occurring. This workshop will look at means of assessing the health of the land and vegetation, and techniques for reversing degradation.

A study particularly of reptiles and their habitats

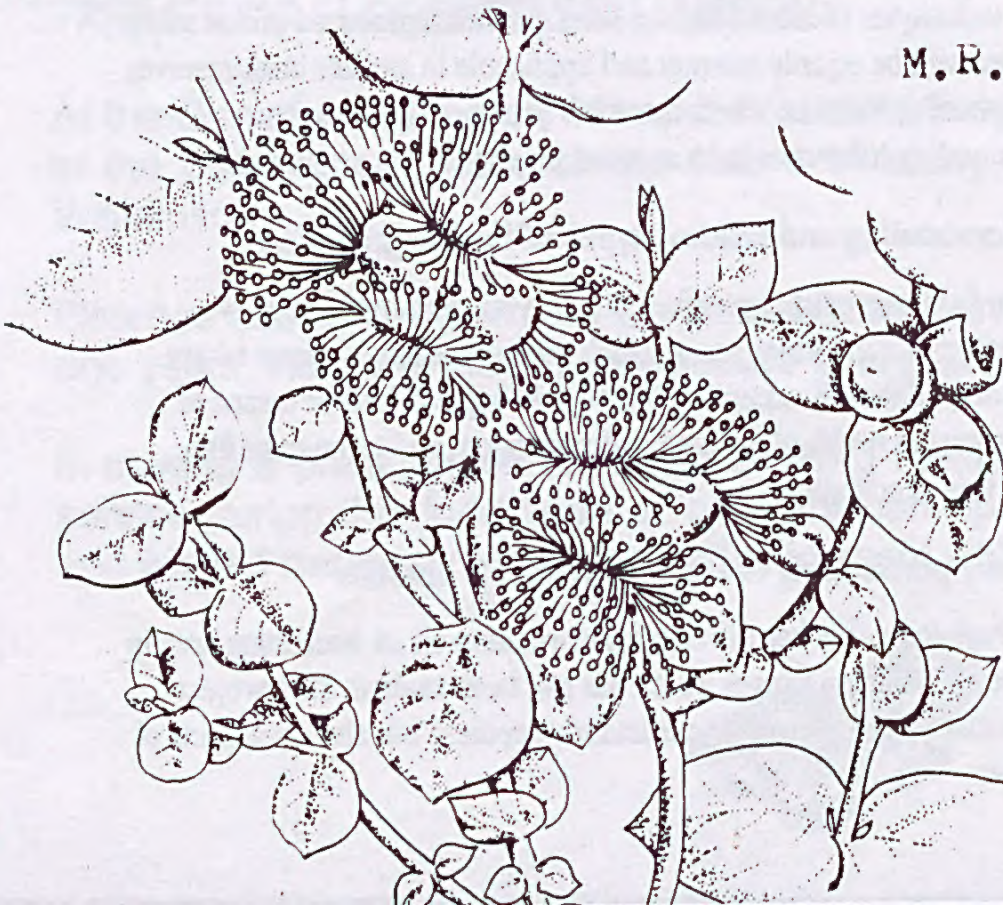
The Park Ranger is keen to obtain information on an interesting area in the north Brisbane Ranges which has not been studied. This project will focus mainly on fauna (particularly reptiles) but also on aspects of habitat.



DUCKS AND CRAKES

The garden of^a/house I visit at Upper Beaconsfield (in the ranges above Berwick) merges with the Beacon Hills golf course, which features a chain of small lakes along the Stony Creek. Last winter in the near record rain the lakes were brimming over making walking hazardous, but attracted Blue-billed Ducks with dazzling blue bills - brighter than I have ever seen - and a Darter. After six months drought, the lakes have dried to a series of ponds and pools and succulent mudflats - ideal habitat for a lone Spotless Crake which I enjoyed watching at sunset, after the golfers had departed. One evening, while watching the crake, I found myself being observed by a potoroo, then a flock of 10 Chestnut Teal flew in and dabbled in a pool only 5-6 metres away. It would be hard to get closer in the wild. Apart from many common water and bush birds, other highlights were a party of 14 Common Bronzewing creeping down to drink at dusk, a flock of 46 Wood Duck (about 20 were resident over three weeks, feeding in the garden in the morning), a pair of resident Grey Butcherbirds coming in to the bird-feeder and, of course, the ever present chiming of the innumerable bellbirds (Bell Miners).

M.R.



BOOL LAGOON

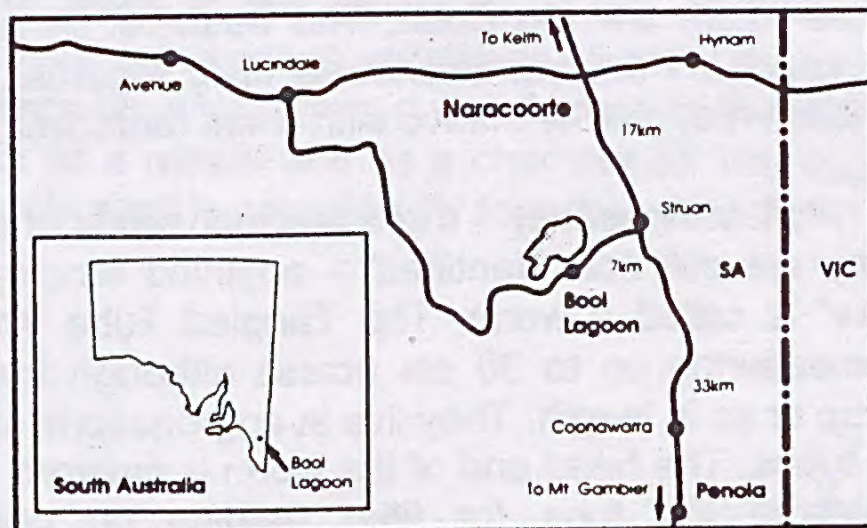
Bool Lagoon is a wetland of international significance. It provides summer refuge for migratory waders and is an important habitat for feeding and breeding local water birds. Situated about 25km south-west of Naracoorte in the South East of South Australia, it is fed by Mosquito Creek and drains from the surrounding farms. The outlet is regulated for flood mitigation and to retain an adequate water level during summer. The lagoon covers 3000 hectares and extends 10km along the waterway of Mosquito Creek.

In mid April, after a dry summer and autumn, ducks were concentrated on a few remaining areas of water. There were thousands of Shelduck, hundreds of Black Duck as well as Australasian Shoveller, Chestnut and Grey Teal. 400 Magpie Geese, 20 Brolgas and 20 Cape Barren Geese along with Ibis, Egret, Herons and Masked Lapwings were spread over the areas covered with vegetation. Feeding in the Bearded Glasswort were Yellow-rumped Thornbills, Golden-headed Cisticola and Blue Wrens.

Raptors were observed over the swamp and surrounds. These included 2 Wedge-tailed Eagle, Little Eagles, Whistling Kites, Swamp Harrier, Brown Falcon, Black-shouldered Kite and Australian Kestrel.

Visitor facilities are very good. Sealed roads lead to several parts of the lagoon. A board walk winds over the swampy surface to a five star bird hide with opening windows, fly-wire doors, carpet and the floor and padded seats. There are many graded walking tracks and strategically placed viewing platforms. Picnic and camping facilities are provided.

The bird list for Bool Lagoon totals 150 species and over 50 were observed in a few hours. It is an interesting place for field naturalists to visit. JG



MARINE BIOLOGY - Margaret O'Toole

Margaret spoke at our April meeting and showed many spectacular slides of underwater life.

Margaret is a marine naturalist currently doing an Aquatic Science course at Deakin University. Her interest began on her first scuba dive and much theoretical and practical study followed. She has worked in coastal National Parks and in 1990 was co-author of "*Down Under at the Prom*" published by the FNC of Victoria and the Department of Conservation and Environment.

Sponges (Phylum Porifera) are some of the simplest form of animals. There are many types and many are brilliantly coloured. Some are hard to identify but others easily recognised - such as the Golf-ball Sponge which is one the few sponges with a constant size and shape.

Cnidarians (Phylum Cnidaria) includes anemones, jellyfish and sea ferns. They all have stinging cells (nematocysts) used to catch prey and as a form of protection. (By the way Margaret recommends ice and vinegar as two remedies). The sea ferns or hydroids flourish in southern temperate waters. Most are feathery or fernlike and usually feed on plankton. Anemones are mainly carnivores actively capturing their prey, which is drawn towards the mouth in the centre of the tentacles and into the body cavity for digestion. The commonly seen White Striped Anemone has bright orange and white striped tentacles and if disturbed fires out white threads strongly armed with nematocysts. Some anemones show aggression by firing at other anemones which are too close. The beautiful Jewel Anemone is a colonial species - several individuals cling together. The individuals are a brilliant red, pink or mauve with white tentacles.

Worms (Phylum Annelida) - there are thousands of described worms but many are still not "identified" - anything tending long, thin and "wormlike" is called a worm. The Tangled Tube Worm is in fact a colony measuring up to 30 cm across although the individuals are only 5 mm or so in length. They live in aggregations of thin interwoven calcium tubes. The head end of the worm is covered by tentacles that protude from the tube for filter feeding on plankton, and for respiration.

Sea Mosses (Phylum Bryozoa) - these are very common around Australia. They are colonial animals, attaching to almost any surface and appear in a variety of colours and formations from flat encrustations to delicate lace like structures. Much of the limestone of the Australian coastline is broken down Bryozoa. The Orange Lace Coral is a beautiful example of this animal.

Crustaceans - lobsters and crabs. These are the most abundant animals in the sea. Of particular interest is the Hermit Crab. The posterior of this crab has no hard covering so an empty mollusc shell is used as protection. As the crab grows it will move out and find a larger shell to move into.

Echinoderms (Phylum Echinodermata) - Sea-stars, Sea-urchins and Sea cucumbers. These spiny-skinned animals are familiar to beach goers. They have a skeleton of calcareous plates under the skin. They possess a unique water vascular system where water is pumped through a specialised pore into a continuous interconnecting system. Tube feet function hydraulically as part of this system and are used for locomotion, attachment and food gathering. In many Sea-stars the stomach can be everted through the "mouth" and the food digested outside the body.

Molluscs - most molluscs (shellfish) are marine. The group includes oysters, scallops, snails and the octopus. Cephalopods are the most highly developed and active of the molluscs, included are octopus, squid and cuttlefish. Cephalopod shells are mostly internal and reduced in size or sometimes absent. They have well developed heads and a mouth situated at the centre of a ring of tentacles. The Paper Nautilus lives in the ocean and feeds on small animals. From birth the female secretes a shell from a web formed by two modified arms - the shell acts as a retreat and as a chamber for the eggs. The beautiful and delicate shell is occasionally found washed up on shores.

VD



New Holland Mouse. *Pseudomys nova hollandia*
Order Rodentia, Suborder Myomorpha,
Family Muridae.

Originally described in the mid 19 century this small rodent lived unnoticed for over 100 years until it was rediscovered in the Kur-ring-gai chase N.P. in 1967. Since then it has been discovered in many dry heath and open forest localities in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. It's patchy distribution is probably the result of marked preferences for soft substrates (usually sand), a heath-type shrub layer of leguminous perennials less than 1 metre high. It's diet changes seasonally and locationally it eats seed, preferred spring and summer, insects and other invertebrates, preferred winter, leaves flowers and fungi, preferred autumn. Since the introduced house mouse has a similar diet there is a direct possibility of competition, however, the available evidence shows the new holland mouse tends to displace the house mouse. With a life span of $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 years there are two classes of female, those in their first year produce only one litter, those in their second year may produce 3 to 4 in the normal 5 month breeding season, from late winter to early summer. They are sexually mature at 7 weeks.

Populations are highest in autumn lowest in spring, they may have a density of up to 17 per h. Although it appears to benefit from habitat disturbance it's future population becomes threatened if the habitat is grossly altered, too frequent burning, urbanisation and clearing of land are detrimental, much of it's habitat is coastal it may become extinct near vacational resorts, it lives in long tunnels with a nest at the end. It's status is common limited, it could be found near Ballarat. There are no sub species.

Elfin.